

**VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM, KANTIAN COSMOPOLITANISM, AND
CONTEMPORARY ETHICS: A PHILOSOPHICAL QUEST***** Dr. Sharmili Mukherjee**<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21078052>**Abstract:**

This paper looks at Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (an Indian moral ideal that sees the world as a family) and Kantian cosmopolitanism side by side in order to find answers to today's ethical problems in a world that is becoming more linked but also more broken up. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which comes from the Mahā Upaniṣad, stresses moral unity, compassion, and duty based on spiritual unity. Kantian cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, promotes a rational, legal, and rights-based framework based on global moral law and the worth of each person. The study looks closely at the philosophical, moral, and political ideas that support these two systems. It shows how they agree on some things that are morally important and how they disagree on how to base moral obligation: spiritually through relationships and legally through laws. This paper argues that neither tradition by itself is enough to solve complicated global crises. It does this by placing both frameworks in the context of debates about global justice, human rights, migration, environmental ethics, and intercultural responsibility. As an alternative, it suggests a conversational ethical synthesis where the moral hospitality and relationship ethics of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam work with Kant's cosmopolitanism to make it more complete. The paper says that this kind of philosophical interaction across cultures provides a stronger and broader basis for modern global ethics that goes beyond the boundaries of civilizations and ideologies.

Keywords: Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam; Kantian Cosmopolitanism; Global Ethics; Comparative Philosophy; Moral Universalism

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Introduction:

Transnational crises like climate change, mass migration, and global inequality have changed the ethical landscape of today. This calls for philosophical frameworks that can go beyond narrow particularisms and establish universal ethical duty. The old Indian ideal of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* and Immanuel Kant's cosmopolitanism are two different but interesting traditions that can be used to answer this question. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which means "the world is one family," comes from the Maha Upanishad (VI.71-73) and says, "Only small-minded people figure out 'this is mine, that is not'; for the generous-hearted, the whole earth is one family" (traditional version). This phrase emphasizes an ethical horizon based on kindness, unity, and the eradication of selfish differences. It is often used to talk about a global moral awareness that encompasses people and, in some interpretations, all living things. Kant's cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, is not based on spiritual metaphysics, but on a very logical moral and legal theory. Kant explains the categorical imperative in his work called *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. He says, "Always follow that

maxim by which you can also wish that it should become a universal law." This principle says that moral responsibility is based on universality and rational autonomy. It creates an ethical egalitarianism that includes all rational beings. Kant wrote *Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795), in which he explains further a framework of cosmopolitan right that includes the right of universal hospitality. He says that "a violation of right in one place of the earth is felt in all," which means that people have a moral duty to support a legal view of global order.

Even though both faiths want to make the world a better place for everyone, they are based on different ideas and have different moral goals. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* comes from a metaphysical view of unity and non-duality. It says that moral behaviour comes from the spiritual understanding that self and other are eventually connected. Kant's cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, is based on the idea that rational agents are free to act however they want and that there are legal and moral conditions that allow states and people to live together peacefully. Kant's idea of "universal

hospitality” protects people from being hostile when they enter foreign lands, but it also recognizes that there are limits to what is morally acceptable. For example, it says that strangers can be turned away “if this can be done without causing their death.” This shows that Kant understood the tension between general moral claims and specific civic duties. Even though they are different, both faiths agree on one thing: moral duties go beyond the local, religious, or national level and include everyone in the world. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* gives us a broad way to think about right and wrong that breaks down rigid lines between ourselves and others. This makes compassion and interdependence basic virtues. With its roots in the categorical imperative and a legal theory of rights, Kant’s cosmopolitanism gives us a way to understand how general moral obligations can be carried out in public law and international order. Kant says that moral rules need to be universalizable, which is a form of ethical equality that fits with *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*’s goal of including everyone. However, Kant uses a critical, logical approach that is different from Indic metaphysical understanding.

So, thinking critically about these practices leads to a philosophical synergy that is good for talking about ethics today. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, on the one hand, asks ethical theory to include social and ecological aspects of moral life that are left out of rights-based and contractualist frameworks. On the other hand, Kantian cosmopolitanism provides a methodologically sound and clear way to define duties and rights that can be incorporated into international law and moral standards. By bringing these different points of view together, we can promote a dialogical ethics that is both normatively global and aware of how different cultures have different moral experiences. This kind of integration is necessary to deal with the moral problems that come up with globalization. There is a need to understand that all people are human, but there is also a need for legal systems that protect people’s rights and keep the peace around the world. In conclusion, both *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* and Kantian cosmopolitanism add to the philosophical search for a modern global ethics. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* does this by expanding the moral imagination toward limitless familial solidarity, and Kantian cosmopolitanism

does this by putting universal duties within a rational and legal-moral framework. The conversation that followed between these traditions offers a broader and more solid moral view that can handle the tricky moral issues of the present day.

Vasudhaiva

Kutumbakam.

Philosophical and Ethical Foundations

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which means “the world is one family” in Sanskrit, is an old saying that is very important to Indian philosophy and moral thinking. This idea comes from the Maha Upanishad (Chapter 6, Verse 72), where the wise say, “This is mine, that is another’s, say the narrow-minded; for those of good character, the whole world is one family” (traditional translation). This saying embodies a transformative worldview that goes beyond narrow attachments and stresses compassion, moral duty, and belonging to all beings. Philosophically, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* is part of the larger Vedantic view of Brahman, which is the ultimate truth that all existence is based on and connects. Vedanta experts have pointed out that this metaphysical oneness easily leads to an ethical imperative: seeing the same consciousness in everyone leads to love, respect, and a shared moral concern for all

life. This moral aspect fits with Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan’s explanation of Vedantic ethics. He says that the Vedanta tradition promotes a “Spirit of Abhedha,” or non-difference in ethics, in which everyone is seen as equal and worthy of respect, creating a foundation for brotherhood between all people. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* is not just spiritual idealism; it is also a good way to think about ethics when people all over the world are connected. Roshan Boodnah compares *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* to the African philosophy of Ubuntu and says that both stress connectedness and group well-being, calling for a shift from individualism to a global family mindset that brings people together around a common moral concern. The story says that this kind of philosophy can help people from different countries work together to solve global issues because it stresses taking responsibility for others and understanding their feelings.

This moral view is also expressed in current interpretations that link *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* to social and environmental duties. Ethical experts say that seeing the world as a family forces us to think about all of human activities and how they affect society, the environment, and politics as a

whole. The idea raises the bar of morality to include all living things and the world itself. It brings ancient wisdom in line with modern moral problems like global justice and sustainability. In this situation, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* goes beyond national and geographical boundaries and serves as a vision for working together, understanding each other, and respecting each other. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* is based on Indian philosophy, but it does not impose a strict set of beliefs. Instead, it encourages people to think about their morals and act in a responsible way. Its call to see the worth in every living thing creates a broad moral horizon where duty and kindness go beyond family ties and territorial claims to include the whole human family. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* not only shows how spiritually united Vedanta is, but it also lays out a moral framework that is still very important for today's moral discussions. It encourages people and groups to be open, respectful, and take responsibility for the well-being of everyone.

Kantian Cosmopolitanism: Moral Universalism and Global Ethics

Kant's cosmopolitanism is a key example of moral universalism in modern

political theory. It bases global ethics on the idea that everyone is rationally autonomous and has equal moral worth. Kant's cosmopolitan view is based on the idea that moral rules should be reasonable and apply to everyone. This view is a direct result of his moral theory, especially the categorical imperative he wrote about in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Here, Kant says, "act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law." He is emphasizing that universal moral duty is the standard for right and wrong behavior (Kant, 1785/1998, 4:421). This idea of universality supports his cosmopolitan beliefs, saying that moral duties go beyond national or regional identities and apply to all rational beings. Kant's political philosophy goes into more detail about this idea of universalism in *Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795), where he presents the idea of cosmopolitan right as an important addition to both domestic and international law. As Kant says in *Supplement* (Section 2, page 15), "our concern here is not with philanthropy but with right," and in this case, "hospitality...means the right of an alien not to be treated as an enemy." Kant puts cosmopolitan ethics in a

legal framework that respects human worth across borders and supports peaceful coexistence by seeing hospitality as a right instead of a kind act. There is a line between the right to universal hospitality and hostile exclusion. Visitors can not be turned away, but they can be if it is done peacefully and without killing anyone. This shows Kant's careful balancing of universal moral claims with political facts (TPP, 8:358–360).

By describing a cosmopolitan right (*ius cosmopoliticum*) based on the idea of shared occupancy of the earth's surface, Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) strengthens his cosmopolitan doctrine even more. It says that "originally no one has more right to be at a given place on earth than anyone else" (TPP, 8:358). This legal premise says that everyone is part of the same human group and that everyone must treat each other with respect and not be hostile. Modern scholars stress that Kant's cosmopolitan law does not take away the power of states. Instead, it forces states to respect the rights of strangers and make universal rights part of international law. According to Kantian research, cosmopolitan law sees people as citizens of the earth, not just subjects of certain states (Singh & Kim, 2017, p.304). Kant's cosmopolitanism is

important because it is not just legal; it is also morally general. He wants the world to be peaceful and thinks that moral people should be able to see and value the inherent worth of every person. This idea fits with his larger moral philosophy. Kant thought that because rational beings are autonomous, they naturally belong to a universal moral community where tasks go beyond local norms (Kant, 1785/1998). Even though Kant's ideas of cosmopolitan right and universal hospitality have some practical boundaries, they still provide the basis for a global ethics that demands that all people are treated equally morally and work together peacefully. This is how Kantian cosmopolitanism can be used as a solid and long-lasting philosophical foundation for discussions about global justice, human rights, and ethical duty across cultures today.

Comparative Ethical Analysis:

By looking at the morals of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* and Kantian cosmopolitanism side by side, we can see that both have strong beliefs in caring about everyone, but their philosophical bases, motives, and effects on institutions are very different. The idea behind *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which means "the world is

one family,” is based on Vedantic metaphysics and includes all living things. It says that moral duty comes from understanding how linked we are to everything else. The Maha Upanishad says, “Only narrow-minded people think ‘this is mine, that is not’; for the generous, the whole earth is one family” (traditional version), which suggests a way of life that does not care about individual differences but cares about everyone. This principle has been seen as more than just idealistic. It has also been seen as promoting cooperation, empathy, and peaceful coexistence across cultural and national borders. This moral vision is relevant to modern global issues like environmental stewardship and conflict resolution. Kantian cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, gets its idea of universalism from practical reason and legal right, not from the idea of philosophical unity. Kant’s moral theory says that moral behaviour must be based on rules that sensible people can will to be universal laws. “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law,” says the categorical imperative. This makes universalizability the standard of moral responsibility and says that everyone has the same moral worth.

Kant takes this idea of universality into his political philosophy with the doctrine of cosmopolitan right in *Toward Perpetual Peace*. He says that for there to be a global ethical order, there must be “universal hospitality” and the understanding that a violation of rights anywhere “is felt in all.” This is a legal recognition of how human rights are linked.

Even though both faiths believe that everyone should be treated with respect, their moral foundations show important differences: *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* explains moral duty in terms of a relational and whole view of unity that often includes ecological and collective well-being. This promotes kindness that goes beyond relationships between people and includes all living things and the environment. Its moral drive comes from spiritual understanding and a sense of belonging as a large family. Kant’s universalism, on the other hand, puts individual freedom and reason first, and moral duty is based on normative tasks that can be understood through reason and stated in legal terms. Kant’s cosmopolitan right, which only covers universal hospitality and polite communication across countries, focuses on laws and established rules to make sure

everyone can live together peacefully in a world with a legal order. This comparison shows a difference in how the two approaches are thought about: *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* comes from a spiritual ontology-based moral of interdependence and unity, while Kant's cosmopolitanism comes from rational autonomy and universal law. But they both agree on one thing: we need to get past our specific problems in order to uphold universal moral duty. Modern researchers say that combining these points of view gives us a bigger picture of right and wrong. They say that this bigger picture combines *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam's* compassionate relational ethics with Kant's structural clarity of juridical universalism so that we can deal with global issues like human rights, climate justice, and intercultural dialogue. This combination improves ethical debate by connecting spiritual-relational and logical-legal points of view. It suggests that moral universalism works best when there are deep relational empathy and stable institutional structures.

Contemporary Ethical Applications:

These days, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* and Kantian cosmopolitanism are more than just vague philosophical ideas. They help us

figure out how to act morally in response to important global problems like climate change, human rights, humanitarian crises, and working together with other countries. The ancient Upanishadic philosophy stresses global unity and shared responsibility. Its main verse, "For the broad-minded, the whole earth is one family" (*ayam nijah paro veti*), challenges identities that leave others out and promotes a sense of planetary belonging and shared stewardship. People have used this point of view in public to make global climate action and human welfare seem like moral obligations that go beyond national lines. They want everyone to work together to reduce climate change and help vulnerable groups fairly. India has used *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* in a diplomatic way at major international forums to bring up universal human rights and environmental responsibility as old moral principles that are still relevant to policy debates today (Gandhi, Vajpayee, Singh, and Modi quoted in Pimpalkhare, 2021). This moral principle fits well with global efforts like the Parliament of the World's Religions' "Towards a Global Ethic," which says that all religions have moral obligations to justice, sustainability, and human dignity. This is similar to *Vasudhaiva*

Kutumbakam's call for the well-being of everyone, not just their own local interests. In real life, this can be seen in ways that people work together to respond to pandemics, fair distribution of vaccines, and international climate deals that put the good of everyone ahead of narrow self-interest. The COVID-19 pandemic made it clear how important it is for people around the world to work together for the sake of ethics. Because of how interconnected public health is, everyone had to share knowledge, resources, and care for each other, showing how moral it is to see everyone as part of one big family.

Kant's cosmopolitanism is based on logic from the Enlightenment, and it also shapes modern moral frameworks by basing cosmopolitan rights on moral universalism. Kant's doctrine of universal hospitality, which says that "originally no one has more right to be at a given place on earth than anyone else," sets a legal standard for peaceful coexistence and respect in a global society. It encourages states to work together without hostility and protects basic human rights across borders. In discussions about international human rights law and refugee ethics, this concept has been very important. Kant's ideas support the idea that

we have a duty to protect everyone, no matter what country they are from, which is very important in this day and age of migration and displacement crises. Philosophers like Seyla Benhabib have used Kant's ideas about universal norms to support open borders and better protections for refugees. They say that the ethical commitments of cosmopolitanism need to change to reflect the current challenges of human rights and global mobility. In this way, both traditions add something important to the world conversation about ethics: *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* is a way of thinking about right and wrong that is based on relationships and connections. It stresses empathy, respecting other cultures, and the well-being of everyone. Kantian cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, is a way of thinking about structure and norms that is based on universal rights and duties. It supports legal and institutional mechanisms for global justice. Bringing these two points of view together makes modern ethical problems more interesting by blending a strong sense of belonging to a global community with the strictness of universal moral and legal rules. This review not only backs up moral responses to climate change, public health crises, and

humanitarian crises, but it also strengthens normative commitments to human dignity, interdependence, and shared duty in a world that is becoming more and more linked.

Conclusion:

This philosophical quest has shown that *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* and Kantian cosmopolitanism are both committed to moral universalism and global ethical duty, even though they come from different intellectual and cultural backgrounds. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* is a highly relational and holistic way of thinking about right and wrong. It is based on the idea that everything is linked, and it encourages compassion, acceptance, and responsibility that go beyond national, cultural, and even anthropocentric borders. Kantian cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, gives us a well-thought-out framework for universal moral law and cosmopolitan right. It turns ethical universality into normative rules that can be put into practice in law and institutions. The comparison shows that Kant's approach ensures ethical universality through rational autonomy and legal norms, but it risks moral abstraction if it is separated from lived relational ethics. Similarly, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* is ethically broad, but it needs normative

structure to help it be used in complex global systems. These faiths work together to create a new way of thinking about right and wrong, where spiritual and relational solidarity strengthens the idea of legal and rational universalism. This kind of dialogical synthesis is especially important when dealing with today's global problems like the climate disaster, violations of human rights, migration, and public health, where ethical responses need to be both universally grounded and sensitive to different points of view. In the end, this interaction between cultures proves that a long-lasting global ethics must bring together moral unity and shared humanity.

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